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Speech

**REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE NORMAN Y. MINETA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

**WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING
WASHINGTON, DC**

**DECEMBER 11, 2005
5:30 PM**

Thank you, Ms. Hardy, for that gracious introduction. But more importantly, thank you all for that very warm reception.

It's my great honor, on behalf of President Bush and Vice President Cheney, to welcome you to the opening ceremonies for the *White House Conference on Aging* here in our Nation's capital city. It's exciting to be among so many committed, thoughtful, and forward-looking Americans.

A special thanks to the United States Coast Guard for being with us today. Your grand presentation of the colors helps emphasize the significance of this very important conference.

I'm pleased to be the first United States Secretary of Transportation to be invited to speak with this dynamic group of leaders. It's hard to imagine transportation not being a vital part of the *White House Conference on the Aging*.

The vast majority of older Americans have voiced their strong preference to age in place. In other words, they want to stay in their neighborhoods and maintain their roots, with both independence and dignity. Transportation is key to this aspiration.

Don't just take my word for it. Over the past year or so, there have been nearly 400 events with nearly 150,000 individuals who have helped shape this conference's agenda. And in every corner of the country, one fact became abundantly clear: transportation is a top concern for the majority of older Americans.

That's because transportation, mobility, is critical to virtually every aspect of our quality of life in America. It's key to employment, to the food we eat, to medical and health care, to our community involvement, to what we buy, and to visiting friends and family.

President Bush recognizes the importance of mobility and access in our society. So he has challenged his Administration to close the gaps and reduce the overlaps in transportation services for those who need a little more help getting where they need to go.

Through the Administration's *United We Ride* partnership, the federal government is answering the President's charge by working hand-in-hand to create a one-stop shop for transportation services.

For example, instead of spending an hour getting transferred from agency to agency to find a ride to a medical appointment, a person can now call one central number, or visit our website, to find reliable transportation.

But availability is just the first step. So we're working with state and local partners to make sure that these transportation services are acceptable, adaptable, and affordable as well.

We're confident that this common-sense approach will yield common-sense solutions.

By 2030, the number of Americans 65 years and older is projected to double and reach 70 million people. So the focus must be on helping our transportation system evolve along with this dramatic population shift.

As we get older, people should not have to worry so much about getting around. We shouldn't feel trapped in their homes, or worse, be forced to move because transportation has become an impediment in their lives.

Fortunately, we're living in a time when technology is opening new avenues to help older Americans maintain their independence, especially when it comes to transportation.

I come from California's Silicon Valley, so I have a natural fascination with technology. And I can tell you that it holds tremendous promise for keeping Americans moving as they age.

Today, for example, communities are using audible pedestrian signals and talking bus stops to allow those with failing eyesight to travel more safely and independently. And pedestrian detectors can adjust signal timing at traffic lights to accommodate slower moving pedestrians.

But, these advances are just the tip of the iceberg.

At the Department of Transportation, we're stepping forward to face this unprecedented mobility challenge head-on. And we believe that research and technology are key to achieving a safely mobile older population, now and in the future.

Our highway and traffic engineers, those responsible for highway design and operations, are working to make roads safer and easier for all Americans to use, including older road users.

Examples of innovation in road safety include larger and brighter roads signs, visibility improvements at intersections, adjustments to pedestrian signal timing, and brighter lines on the road.

In addition to improving road design, the Department is also committed to helping older drivers remain behind the wheel as long as they are safe to stay there. So our safety experts are researching adaptive devices that provide better control over automobiles for those who need a little extra help.

Together with law enforcement and allied health professionals, we're working to help older Americans recognize their changing abilities and adapt their transportation practices to match them.

You can learn more about the Department of Transportation's commitment to keeping Americans moving when you visit *Mobility Matters* in the exhibit hall.

Millions of Americans are now living longer, more productive lives. And many are choosing to stay active in the workforce and in the community. It's our job to make sure that they have the opportunity to do just that.

You have a mighty big job ahead of you in the next three days as you discuss how to preserve and extend such opportunities. Your collective wisdom and experience will be vital in sorting out the many complex policy recommendations that will be presented to the President and Congress on behalf of older Americans.

So on behalf of President Bush and Vice President Cheney, thank you for your commitment to keeping older Americans moving today and in the future.

And thank you for investing both valuable time and energy to make this *White House Conference on Aging* a tremendous success. I look forward to working with all of you to make sure that your recommendations are put in place for the benefit of our senior population.

Travel safely. May God bless you and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

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